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PALESTINE EXPLORATION FUND.

ABILA

OF THE

DECAPOLIS.

BY

GOTTLIEB SCHUMACHER, C.E.

With original Plans, Illustrations, and a Map.

LONDON:
THE SOCIETY'S OFFICE, 1, ADAM STREET, ADELPHI, W.C.,
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PREFACE.

AT the request of the Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, I have undertaken to see the account of my friend Herr Schumacher's survey of the ruins of Âbil through the press, and make such modifications of idiom as were needful to render the descriptions clear. Except for this, I have made as little alteration as possible, considering that Herr Schumacher's own words would best describe the interesting ruins of Abila of the Decapolis, of which he is the first explorer to publish plans and drawings.

The Arabic names are printed as Herr Schumacher has written them, and give the present—rather than the classical—orthography.

The illustrations have all been engraved expressly for the present publication from the drawings and plans sent home by Herr Schumacher. They will

enable the reader to form a clear idea of one of the many interesting sites in the country east of the Jordan, which is so rarely visited.

The ruins were evidently of very considerable extent, and show the remains of buildings that must have boasted originally no inconsiderable architectural splendour. History takes little count of the town of Abila of the Decapolis—some half dozen incidental references are the most that can be found; but Herr Schumacher's description and drawings of Temple, Theatre, and Basilica are again proof, if need were, of the many wonderful remains of lost cities which still await the explorer in the fertile upland regions of the country across the Jordan.

GUY LE STRANGE.

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ABILA

OF THE

DECAPOLIS.

LAST February I again found opportunity to visit the high Plateau of Haurân, and took my way by Tiberias, round the south end of the lake, and up the steep road Darb el-Akabeh to Kefr Hârib and Fîk, the westernmost villages of the Haurân. The country was everywhere dried up, and the green along the road poor, a result of the little rain that had fallen this winter. The seeds had hardly sprouted, and it was with sorrowful forebodings that the Haurân Fellah looked forward to the coming crops. Large parcels of land had remained untilled, hardly a plough-share had been driven across the fields to prepare the soil for the 'seify' or summer sowing. The cattle, from the want of pasture, were already in a miserable state, and the natural watering-basins throughout Haurân were

already nearly dry. At Kefr el-Ma, where we passed the night, the youth of the village were just setting out in procession, walking arm in arm, the young girls following behind the young men, marching in rank, striking old petroleum cans the while, and shouting and crying in every possible melody, praying for rain. Now and again a miserable old Fellah would pour a quantity of water over a row of the boys and these immediately would cover their heads with the 'aba' or mantle, and rushing through the streets, cried 'Shitâ, shitâ!' (rain, rain). This symbolic joy fortunately soon became a reality, for a week later the clouds poured down their sources of blessing over the thirsty land, and the dearth and drought were remedied.

Next day I pushed further eastwards, taking my way from Kefr el-Ma, not through the wild gorge of the Rukkâd, but straight to the bridge of Jisr er-Rukkâd, through a most stony, rough country, covered with basalt masses. Here and there along the small Wâd el-Mu'akkar (a wady running east and west from Tell el-Mu'akkar—*see* map of 'Jaulân') springs gush out among the black lava rocks and produce a fresh oasis in this dry country. Leaving to the right the ruin El-Murujeh, a large heap of stones, with traces of strong walls and the remains of some modern huts, we cross to the Rukkâd at the bridge just mentioned. The wady bed is not deep here, the stream being about 15 feet across and one foot deep,

tumbling over the gigantic basalt blocks down to the first cataract, a couple of hundred yards below the Jisr.

From here we proceeded through the marshy ground surrounding 'Ain Dakar, and across the dolmen field of that neighbourhood. To our surprise we found every now and again that a dolmen had been turned over, and especially the large covering slabs were thrown down, and the dolmen interiors dug up. On inquiry in the matter, we learnt that the Fellahîn and Bedawîn, after my repeated visits to the place and investigations of these monuments, had come to the conclusion that I was looking for treasure among the 'Kubûr Beni Israîl,' and, therefore, they also had tried their luck in investigating the interiors with hoe and hands. But whether any 'kens' (treasure) had been found, I could not discover.

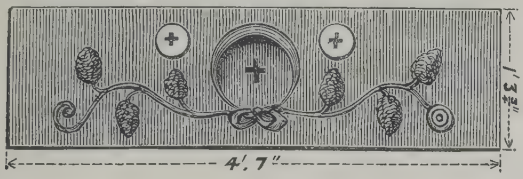
Following the Roman road coming from the country west of the Rukkâd, and crossing the plateau between Tsîl and 'Adwân, we reached the so-called capital of Haurân, Sheikh Sa'ad, in the latter part of the same afternoon. The Merkez, or seat of government, was but little changed since my last visit in 1884 and 1885 The sûk (market) has improved, and here and there a house for the Government officials had been erected; a sort of inn also had been built. Next to this stood a large khan and dry-goods store, held by a Damascus merchant, who willingly took us to look

at his property. Among liquors and dainties that were the products of Damascus, I discovered some canned provisions, and amongst the rest some tinned lobsters. Some of these latter I took with me as a curiosity, proving that civilization had found its way even into the heart of Haurân to this degree. But, alas! when the can was opened next day near Mzeirîb, its contents had quickly to be consigned to the floods of the holy lake of Bajjeh!

The Mutasarrif, or Governor, of Haurân was absent in the 'Jebel,' to collect the taxes from the hostile Druses, and look out for a suitable site for a Government colony near the Lejjâ at Busr el-Harîry; for, in view of the continual quarrels between Druses and Bedawîn, the Government had at last decided to erect a strong place there, from which both peoples could be controlled and, in case of need, brought into subjection by the strong arm of military authority.

After concluding my official business with the Acting Governor, I strolled through the Government building, which is in a state of decay, as nothing is ever mended or looked after. The 'livân,' or corridor, in front of the room where the 'Mejlis Idâra' (Administrative Council) was in full session, was, I now discovered, built on the foundations of an ancient apse, while the room itself was in part formed from the aisles of a Christian Church that had in former times belonged to the great convent of Job (*see*

'Across the Jordan,' p. 188 ff). The main axis of the church ran nearly due north and south. In the walls of the modern building, the many ancient crosses had been generally destroyed by fanatic hands. In the opposite wing, the southern part of the Merkez, the lintel ornament given below (the crosses somewhat defaced) was masoned into the wall.



Ornamental Lintel at Merkez.

From Sheikh Sa'ad we started next morning southwards towards 'Ajlûn. At Mzeirib we made our first halt near the Government flour mill. In addition to what I have said on pages 27 and 28 in 'Across the Jordan,' I may add that I further discovered on the east bank of the Bahret el-Bajjeh, a thermal spring, about 100 yards south of the mill there mentioned. The water is sweet, but had a temperature of 28° C. (84° F.), while the lake itself had but 24° C. (75° F.) The village and market (Ed Dukkakîn) is becoming less and less inhabited, the feverish climate of the place contributing greatly to its falling into ruin.

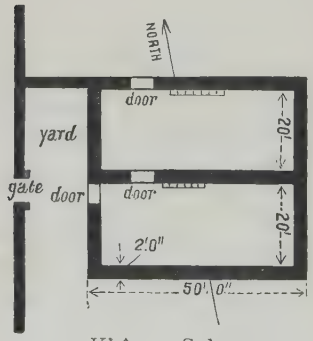
From Mzeirîb we turned westwards to Tell esh

Shehâb, and without entering that populous village, descended the slopes of the Wâd el-Meddan (*see* map). The slopes and bed of this large wâdy are formed by a soft crumbling white limestone ; the road winds along the precipices and finally crosses the bed at a place where the stream is, at this season, hardly flowing, though forming here and there basins of water, full of fish. The heaps of basalt blocks and *débris* lying about in the wâdy bed, however, prove that this stream, coming from the interior of Haurân, is very powerful after a rainfall. We climbed the southern bank and reached a fertile, well-cultivated, and nearly stoneless plateau, and then rode across it in a western direction for about two miles. We afterwards crossed the small dry Wâdy Shômar (شومر). Nowhere in this plateau were there any stones. The soil of this region lies in very deep layers, as may be seen from the wâdy bed, and is said to be most fertile. With a short bend northwards we reached 'Amrâwah (عمراوه). The village contains about 40 huts, generally built of mud, few stones being used, as the Sheikh has built up all the old remains into his own dwelling. The village lies on a parcel of ground that is slightly elevated above the surrounding plateau. It has a poor appearance, but has splendid soil all round it. The drinking water is brought from near the Wâd Tell Shehâb. We tied our horses in the courtyard of the Sheikh's dwelling,

while our zaptich (soldier) went to seek the Sheikh among the villagers. Meanwhile carpets were spread in the 'madâf' (also called 'menzûl'), or room for guests the 'nukra,' or fireplace, was cleansed, wood for fuel brought, and the coffee cans rinsed and prepared. Meantime Sheikh Jeber arrived, bid us welcome and sat down beside us. He was an old but well-fed and pleasant-looking Fellah, half blind, but still very active. After inquiring, as usual, our health and our doings, he soon began to give us a long account of his life and adventures in Haurân. He had risen from being a common Fellah of Tuffas, in Haurân, to the post of Sheikh here, having expropriated land while 'Amrâwah was yet a ruin and the state of things in Haurân quite unsettled ; and after long and bloody skirmishes with the Bedawîn, had ended by having his land 'registered,' and now calls the rich village his own property, while all the inhabitants are his 'haratîn' or 'ploughers.'

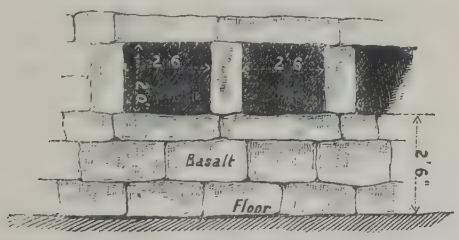
I several times made the attempt of inquiring into the position of Âbil, but he always avoided the question. Coffee was passed round once or twice, cigarettes and pipes smoked, the room began to be crowded with his subordinates, but my questions remained unanswered. At last I remarked on the ancient remains of capitals, columns, and ornaments I saw lying about in his yard, and asked where they came from. 'Oh,' replied he, 'they come from your

fathers, and I will show you still more of them.' He rose and led us to an ancient building, roofed with basaltic slabs, as is usual in the old Haurân architecture, which he had made into a stable and straw barn. 'This is my grain magazine, friends,' he continued; 'formerly it was called "Khân es-Sultany," خان السلطني (the Imperial Khân), and now it is called "Khân Jeber."' He concluded with a chuckle. This Khân has a length of about 50 feet, and is divided into two equal sized rooms, each 20 feet wide and about 15 feet high, connected by a door. The masonry is very carefully executed. Large hewn stones of basalt are masoned together, evidently without mortar, and the roofing, as above noted, is the same as that, for instance, at Kh. Samakh, in Haurân ('Across the Jordan,' p. 183). The covering slabs are long and about a foot thick; they are supported by arches which cross from side to side. The Khân was partly subterranean, the present floor lying several feet below the surface of the yard. Near the western entrance I saw a head of an Apollo, beautifully carved in basalt, but



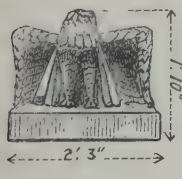
Khân es Sultan.

very much defaced, and lying buried in the manure heap of the stable. On the northern walls I found rows of mangers 2 feet 6 inches wide, 2 feet high, similar to those I had already seen in Jaulân and Haurân. Near the Sheikh's dwelling a fine basalt



Mangers.

arch-stone, with engraved egg ornament and frieze, was found, evidently that of a gate 8 to 10 feet wide; and in front of his Menzûl the Sheikh had set up a fine Roman eagle, of the exact size and shape of the one found on the top of the Tell Abu en Neda, in Jaulân (*see* 'The Jaulân,' p. 250), only in this case the wings were spread and the head had unfortunately been broken off. The capitals were Corinthian, while the bases of the columns lying about were Attic. The building stone, without exception, was basalt.



Roman Eagle at Amrâwah in Basalt.

When the Sheikh had most willingly shown us all

these treasures, he looked up, and pointing westwards towards Wad esh Shelâleh, said: 'And now I will show you the ruin you look for. But few know it by the name of Âbil; it is generally called El Kueilby; but as it belongs to my own lands, I know its original name, and will show it to you, if you give me a share in the treasure you assuredly will try to find there.' All my asseverations to the contrary, that I merely wished to sketch some fine ornaments of the place, being a 'mehendis' (engineer) were in vain; the old fellow simply replied, 'See, my son, this village is my own; the land all around is my property, but I have 'harratîn' (sowers) to whom I rent the land; they plough, cultivate, and sow it, and the fifth of the net income of the crops is mine. The same with you, friend; you dig on my property at Âbil, and the fifth, no, the tenth, of all you find is mine, the remainder yours,' and with repeated chucklings he entered the menzûl, pushing me on in front of him. I had finally to agree to the bargain, as I saw that I should never convince the whimsical old fellow of the truth as to the nature of my explorations, and obtained a guide (being also trustee for his share of the treasure), who was to take us to Âbil. He then ordered breakfast, and when it had been despatched, bid us farewell, on the understanding that we should soon return again, and 'always consider him a good, trustworthy friend.' Hugging me affectionately

in his arms, he exclaimed, 'All my talk was a mere joke. I do not want my share of the treasure, Masalamy!' 'Allah selmak!' (God bless you), I replied, glad of having found a guide and got rid of this wonderful old Sheikh. I often spoke of him to people who knew the country, and, without exception, all esteem him and praise the hospitality of Sheikh Jeber.

We left 'Amrâwah in the later part of the afternoon, rode westwards for a mile and a half over a beautiful, fertile plain, leaving the village of Khirbet ez-Zneibeh to our right, and shortly arrived at the borders of the great Wâdy esh Shelâleh. Khirbet ez-Zneibeh is a village of thirty-five huts, a little better built than 'Amrâwah, standing just above the steep declivities of the wâdy, and thence occupying a fine and commanding view down into the river-bed and over across the surrounding country. The descent down the bank was very tiresome, as we had to pass from an elevation of 1,200 feet down to 245 feet above the sea level, the path being further rocky, winding, and steep, and the temperature high. When at last we arrived at the wâdy bed 1,000 feet below the plateau, horses and men were covered with sweat, and were glad to find a cool stream running between a luxurious growth of oleanders and cane. The slopes of Wâdy Shelâleh are of a soft limestone formation, sparsely covered with brushwood. This is

the natural boundary where the basaltic formation ceases, and it is also the limit of Haurân, for Shelâleh separates 'Ajlûn from that country. The little stream is hardly 2 yards across and about 6 inches deep, and may probably dry up in hot summer days completely. The ascent up the western slope was still more tiresome than the descent had been ; the road led for an hour over continuous rocky terraces, along the side of a wâdy, winding round the bare slopes until we finally arrived at 'Ain el-Kattâra,* عين القطّاره a small stream flowing out of a cave in a bare perpendicular rock. On the soft, white limestone rock surrounding the 'Ain, we saw numerous 'wasm' or tribe-marks of the Bedawîn ; most were the arrow-head wasm of the Z'obey زعبه Bedawîn ; thus ⍑, also crosses were numerous, especially in the interior of the cave. In front of the spring there is a small piece of flat ground, which has often served as camping place for Bedawîn. In fifteen minutes we reached the plateau again, and found ourselves in the district of El Kefarât of 'Ajlûn. The plateau is fertile and well cultivated. After riding a mile further we at last reached the eastern shoulder of Wâd el-Kueilby, and on the other side appeared Âbil. The descent down the slopes was more easy,

* 'Ain el Kattâra, 'the slowly-dropping spring.

and took only half as long as that of Wâd esh Shelâleh. The Wâd el-Kueilby rises some miles south of Âbil, flows at first northward, and then bends somewhat to the north-west, and then north again, when it joins the Yarmûk not far west of the Tell ej-Jâmid (*see* map of Haurân), having a length of about eight miles, and a total fall (from 1,400 feet above the Mediterranean at its rise to about 80 feet at its junction) of about 1,300 feet.

On reaching the ancient site I proceed to enquire of the keepers of the herds grazing in the neighbourhood as to the name of the ruin, leaving meanwhile my guide at the stream below, where he was washing his feet and beginning his evening prayer. He, therefore, had no communication with them before my inquiries were put. They told me, 'the entire ruin is generally known by the name of El Kueilby القُيلبة the diminutive of قلُبُ (small well), for I find no other translation. The spelling الكعيلبه, pp. 10 and 101 of "Across the Jordan," is wrong. The hill to the north is also named Tell Âbil تلّ آبل, and the one we now stood on (the southern ruin) was Tell Umm el 'Amad تل ام العمد These are the true names. A later inquiry at Harta gave the same result.

We were thus on the very spot discovered by Seetzen on the 25th of February, 1806, which he

considered to be the Abila of the Decapolis, and which, to my knowledge, has not been visited or described by any subsequent explorer.

The same evening I surveyed and sketched a part of the caves and ruins, and then pushed on to Harta, which I reached after half an hour's ride. Next morning early I returned again, and completed my explorations, of which I now proceed to give an account.

The site is built over two hill summits. The northern one, Tell Âbil, is surrounded to the north and east by deep and steep wâdies, while on the south a less precipitous wâdy separates it from the Tell Umm el 'Amad,* which ruin is situated on a projection of the high plateau at the same height as Tell Âbil, and is also surrounded on three sides by wâdies. The Tell Âbil contains many heaps of hewn stones, foundations of large buildings, fragments of columns and capitals, but no distinct ruin which could be planned. The central spot among the *débris* was the most elevated—1,340 feet above the sea, according to my barometer; and to judge from the large, well-hewn stones lying about, this must have been a prominent building, probably a castle. A

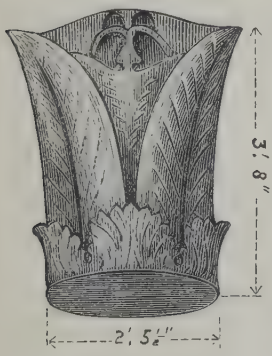
* [Meaning 'the mother of columns,' or the 'columned hill. —EDITOR.]

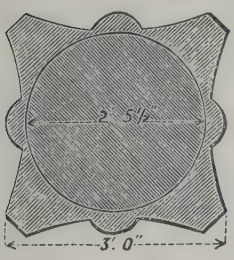
little lower down the hill to the south we find fragments of a gate, a lintel of basalt, 6 feet long, with a crowning ornament, and an open space in the city wall. This hill was surrounded by a well-masoned wall, the traces of which could be followed up in its southern and eastern sides, but the traces became lost on the north and also partly on the west side, where the slopes of the wâdy are very steep and the protection of the wall therefore the less needed. The average thickness of the wall varies from 2 to 3 feet. The stones are placed exactly like those of the walls of Umm Keis ; no mortar was discoverable, but it must have originally existed, for the building stone, a crumbling limestone, was not fitted like the basalt to remain unmortared. The area thus surrounded by the wall covers about 2½ English acres. To the east a narrow shoulder of the plateau also shows scattered ruins surrounded by a wall, which continues round terraces down the slope to near the Wâd el-Kueilby. The other slopes below the main ruin are also terraced artificially and bordered by walls. (*See* map.)

A long straight wall running from east to west seems to divide the main ruin into two halves. The crumbling nature of the building stone has, however, left no traces of ornamentation. Passing down the western slope of Tell Âbil we arrive at a wall, which, 13 feet thick, pierced by a vaulted passage-way, partly preserved, in

part falling in; and what was probably a similar passage-way is the opening where the road comes in from Harta. As the configuration of the land here shows a depression between Tell Âbil and the southern site, this wall may possibly be the remains of a bridge built to form an easy communication between the two places. This is the more likely, as the spot presents but little difficulty for such a construction. This bridge may be the same as that of which Seetzen speaks on page 372 of vol. I. I remember, too, having found a similar construction at Tabakât Fahil, Pella, also outside the city wall, and there uniting Tell el Husn with Fahil. After passing the bridge and continuing southwards for 100 yards more, we arrived at the ruins of Tell Umm el 'Amâd. The first monument visible is a temple. Fragments of columns lie about, with fine capitals and bases. Several of the basalt and limestone columns have from 1 foot $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches to 3 feet diameter. Unluckily, it is just the larger and more interesting capitals that are worked in the crumbling limestone which abounds here, and is the rock formation from this side of Haurân down to the western border on the Ghôr; it is the same stone we also found at Umm Keis, and which so rapidly disintegrates with the weather. One specimen of the capitals we saw has the shape of a cup. Each of the four corners shows a leaf, very probably a palm leaf, while the lower part is ornamented with acanthus leaves. The

height of this capital is 3 feet 8 inches; its upper diameter 3 feet, its lower 2 feet $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches. It is probably the identical one of which Seetzen speaks on p. 372, giving the design of the leaf ornament; but he was wrong in stating that 'the capitals are of grey marble,' for, as before-mentioned, they are of a crumbling limestone, which, however, shows a greyish surface from the effects of weather.

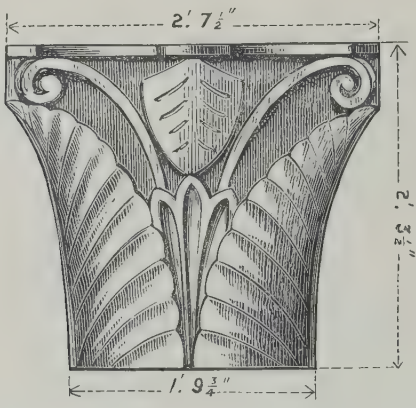




No. 1.—Capital at Tell Umm el 'Amâd.

The annexed sketch illustrates this capital (No. 1.) A second capital (No. 2) also shows on each corner a leaf ornament with upper volutes of Ionic character with a shield in between on each side. Its height is $23\frac{1}{2}$ inches, its upper diameter $27\frac{1}{2}$ inches, its lower 1 foot $9\frac{3}{4}$ inches. A third specimen of the capitals (No. 3), and the largest of all, has an upper diameter of 4 feet, and a lower of 3 feet, with a height of 2 feet 10 inches. It has, therefore, a broader character. The acanthus leaf ornament covers the lower part, and winds up the sides, ending in the middle of

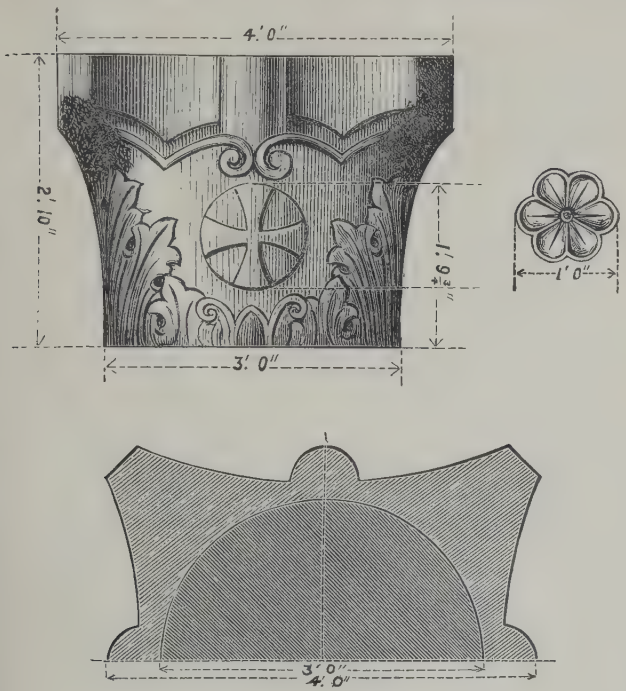
each side in volutes. Between the leaves on two of the



No. 2.—Capital at Tell Umm el 'Amâd.

sides we discovered a carefully carved cross, and on the two others a rose ornament. This emblem proves this building must have been of Christian origin, although from the absence of any traces of an apse discoverable among the ruin, it is impossible to make out whether it was a Christian basilica or a temple. The plan of this temple, as we may call it, is given on the plan of Tell Âbil. From what yet remains, the building must have had a rectangular form; the main axis runs nearly due east and west, inclining only 4° from true east towards north. The length from east to west is 152 feet, the entire present width from north to south is 65 feet. The width is divided into two not quite equal halves by a line of columns 7 feet

8 inches apart; four columns of this row yet stand showing a height of 1 to 3 feet above the surface; they



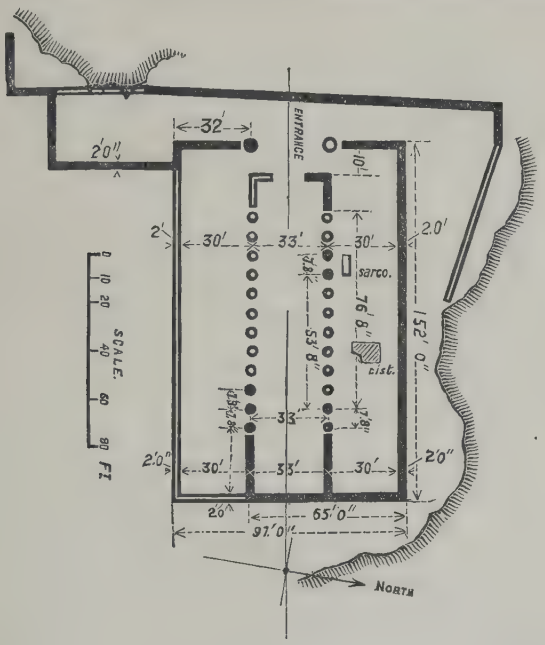
No. 3.—Capital at Tell Umm el 'Amâd.

were built of basalt and limestone, and composed of shaft-pieces from 3 to 4 feet long, and 1 foot 10 inches in diameter. The original number of columns on this division line must have been twelve. The present exterior wall on the south yet contains three columns, which, like the above, stand 7 feet 8 inches apart

though scarcely now visible above the surface, each being 1 foot 10 inches in diameter. At the western end of this line we remarked a large column 3 feet in diameter, near to which lay the capital No. 3 (with cross). The positions of the columns in the two rows correspond with one another. As the north wall contains no columns I presume there was another wall on the south, thus completing a temple of three nearly equal naves, and I am justified in this conjecture by the traces still existing in the western walls. The annexed plan shows the present plan and its probable restoration, with a width of 97 feet and a length of 152 feet. The western wall still continues towards south and north, and may have been built round a yard, like that of the Pella Basilica.

It is not impossible that apses may originally have existed in this building, for heaps of *débris* are still to be seen at the eastern end. I undertook a little excavation here, but could obtain no results. In the northernmost of the three naves I found a rectangular cistern, 19 by 19 feet, and 8 feet deep, the sides well plastered with reddish mortar. A fig tree is growing out of the interior. We also found a similar basin at the Pella Basilica. As the temple is situated about 130 feet above Wâd-el-Kueilby, the construction of a cistern to contain drinking water was not out of place. A little above this cistern we found a broken basalt sarcophagus, 6 feet long

covered with wreath ornaments and garlands. The large column shafts, 3 feet in diameter, and upwards



Plan of Temple on Tell Umm el 'Amâd.

EXPLANATION.—Black lines, present wall; Double lines, supposed line of old wall.

of 14 feet long, show the same rectangular drill-holes on the outside, as those I noted on the Pella columns. The tribe of the 'Arab-el-Khurshân عرب النحرشان have engraved their 'Wasm' on many of these columns. With the exception of the few hard

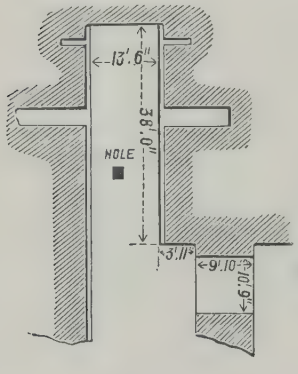
limestone columns on the east of the temple which have a length of 16 feet 5 inches, and short basalt shafts, everything here is very much weather-worn and defaced. The foundation walls are hardly traceable. To the south of the temple ruin was a field scattered over with ruins, with traces of buildings and fragments of ornaments. It is a small plateau covering about four acres.

Having explored the two ruins of Tell 'Âbil and Umm-el-'Amâd, which are situated on the heights of the plateau, we next went down towards the Wâdy el-Kueilby, and not far from the temple, first came on a large theatre. The configuration of the slope was made use of to form the amphitheatre, the seats—of which but few remained—were placed on a masoned foundation, for the reception of which the soft rock had been prepared. No ornament, or cornices of any kind in this interesting monument were sufficiently preserved to be sketched, for the crumbling of the limestone soon destroys all traces of tool work. I found the diameter of this theatre to be 240 feet, measured at its widest part; the rows of seats faced north-east. From the centre of the theatre a strong, straight wall running nearly due north, goes for 100 yards towards the paved road (*see* below), while immense heaps of ruins, stones, fragments of columns, etc., surmount this wall and mingle with the remains from another ruin, situated

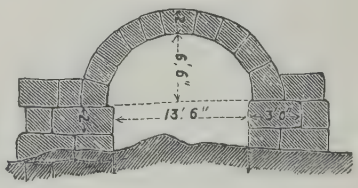
further to the east towards the wâdy. This next ruin is of rectangular shape. The building stones are larger and more carefully hewn than those found elsewhere. Several columns stand to the height of a yard at the southern end of the building close to one another, and evidently not *in situ.* In the interior we found a wide cistern, now filled up with rubbish, and on the east a vault, with a nearly circular arch, 13 feet 6 inches wide, and 38 feet long, masoned with blocks of stone upwards of 3 feet long, and 2 feet high and broad. On the two longer sides there are openings, 12 feet long, by 2 feet high and wide. In the crown of the vault there is also a small opening. The accompanying illustration is from a photograph.

Vault at 'Abîl.

Below is given the section and plan of this vault. Being unplastered, I cannot conjecture the purpose to which it was originally put. The building above was possibly a sort of court-yard for the administration of justice.



Plan.



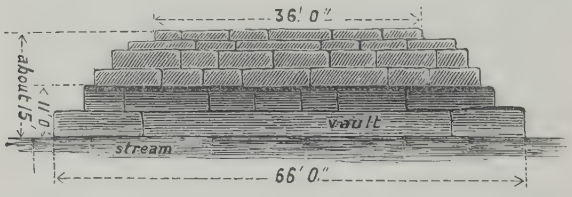
Section.

Still further down towards the stream we found many other ruins of buildings, with long straight walls and fragments of defaced ornaments; here and there also a column shaft or capital. Next to the theatre, and in a straight line 250 feet east of the temple just described, are the ruins of a second monument of Christian origin, a Basilica, of which the walls and apse yet stand to a height of 2 to 3 feet. This Basilica, as much as can yet be seen—for the interior is filled with heaps of building material—has but one large chamber, this is rectangular, 81 feet in length to the apse, and 62 feet wide. The apse

itself has a radius of 16 feet 1 inch, equivalent to a width of 32 feet 2 inches, giving an entire length for the church, along the main axis, of 97 feet 1 inch. On the west and on the south we find traces of doors 4 feet 7 inches wide. The walls are 2 feet 6 inches thick, with no signs of mortar, although this would have been indispensable, since the building is of limestone, large and carefully hewn; the manner of laying the courses being the same as that seen at the Basilica of Pella. The main axis is oriented north 89° east, and is, therefore, but 1° from running due east and west. No columns, or any interesting remains of cornices or ornamentation was discoverable anywhere near. The church is situated below the upper terrace of the temple, on a small level piece of ground; standing above and at the edge of a second terrace there about 20 feet high. It has thus a free view over the wâdy below, from which it is about 180 yards distant, with the beautifully green valley lying between. The steep slope below this Basilica is covered with *débris* fallen down from above.

Following down the road that comes in from Harta, we pass, as has been already described, through the opening in what we have supposed to be the bridge, between Tell 'Âbil with Tell Umm el 'Amâd, and passing further down the depression which separates the two ruins, we come, at 500 feet from the bridge, on a paved road of the present width of

from 10 to 16 feet, which runs in an easterly direction down to the dam, or bridge, across the Wâdy el-Kueilby. The paving stones are generally of basalt, being similar in character to those of the Darb er Raseifiyeh of Umm Keis, only these here are smaller, being only a foot square. The bridge itself has a length of about 250 feet, which is the width of the wâdy bed. It has but one circular vault, or arch, well preserved, across the little stream, only 9 feet 7 inches wide—a proof that the Wâdy el Kueilby never carries any considerable amount of water. The top line, or

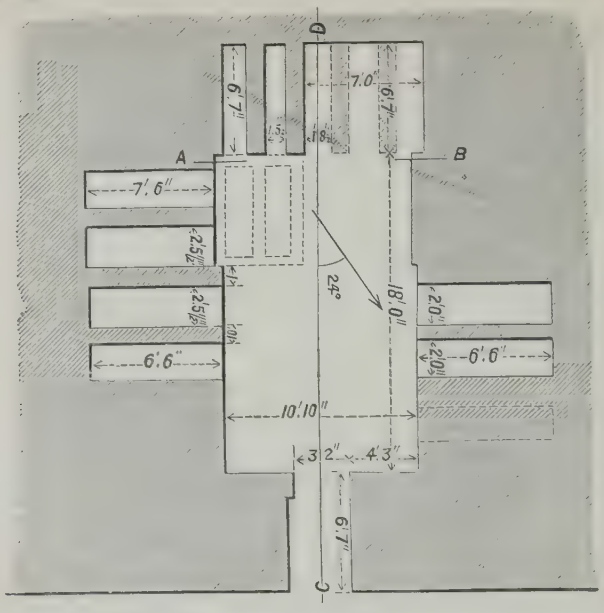


roadway, along the bridge is paved, and 36 feet wide. Below the structure widens out by terraced buttresses to a width of 66 feet, apparently a very unnecessary strengthening of the structure. The Wâd el-Kueilby contains clear, good water, which flows down to the Yarmûk; the stream is, at the bridge, 8 feet across, and 6 inches deep. At the east end of the bridge, on the roadway, is the Weli of the Mohammedan Saint, Sheikh Muferrej, شيخ مفرّج, it is a small ruined building containing fragments of walls, with a little prayer niche on the south.

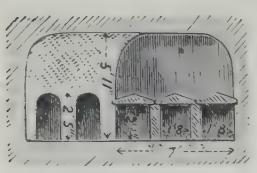
On the slopes of Wâdy Âbil, especially bordering the site of the old town, as well as on the Wâdy Umm el 'Amâd and the slopes near the Wâd el Kueilby, we found numerous caves hollowed out, in the soft lime-stone rock. The best specimens are on the rocky Wâdy Âbil and the adjacent slope. Of these, I give the plans of the most interesting. Beginning on the eastern slope near, and partly bordering on the Wâdy, we have cave No. 1 (*see* plan). It contains a central room, 18 feet by 10 feet 10 inches, of rectangular shape, and 5 feet 11 inches high. The walls are perpendicular, with rounded edges near the ceiling; the ceiling is level. The main axis is oriented North 24° East. The entrance is on the north-east, but at present partly filled up with rubbish; no stone gate was discoverable. The three walls contain Kokim, four are hewn in the wall to the left of the entrance; these are 6 feet 6 inches long, 2 to 3 feet high, and 2 feet 5 inches wide, a fifth Koka is unfinished. One foot below these, we find a second row of graves, one small Koka being in the wall, and two Loculi in the floor with a notch round the edge, for fitting the covering slab into (*see* plan).

These two-storied graves are characteristic of the sepulchral caves of Âbil, for on the west wall we also find two Kokim in the upper part, and one foot lower, a third Koka, with round edges (*see* plan).

The south wall contains on one side, two narrow

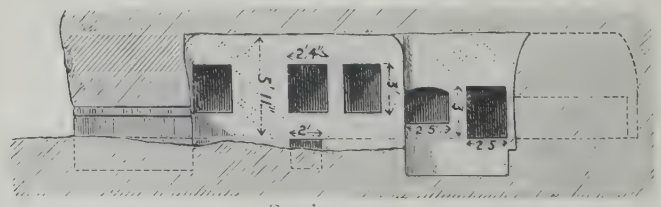


Plan of Tomb No. 1.



Section A, B.

Marks found on the Wall of the Tomb.

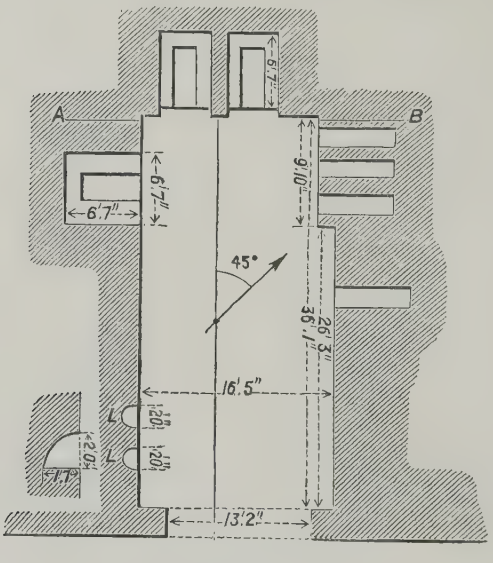


Section C, D.

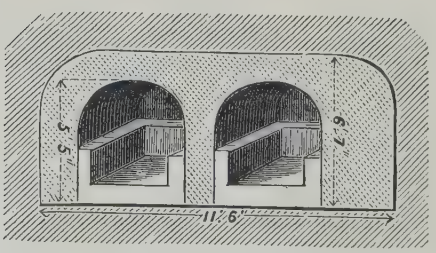
Kokim, only 1 foot $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, in which I found some human bones, and next to this, was a chamber, 7 feet wide, and 6 feet 7 inches deep, 5 feet 11 inches high, containing three sarcophagi, formed by two division walls, 1 foot thick, and each covered by a single huge slab of limestone. In front of these sarcophagi-Kokim, I found several stone plates, 2 feet $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches high, 2 feet wide and 9 inches thick, of a soft white cretaceous stone, on each of which was cut in bas-relief, the semblance of the bust of a human figure. Unfortunately, these had been all defaced, as I was told, by the fellahîn, who take such figures to represent idols, and in accordance with the dictates of their religion, destroy them. The work is not very skilfully done, but from what we could see, was probably of Christian origin. These stones have served for closing the sarcophagi. No sign of plastering was anywhere discoverable. A neighbouring cave to that just described, contained Kokim and Loculi, and above, on each wall, as many as four rows of semicircular holes, with from 8 to 10 in the row. These, to judge from their black colour, and traces of soot, must have served as stands for oil lamps, used to illuminate the sepulchral chamber. Each hole was some 8 inches high, 4 inches wide, and 3 to 4 inches deep.

Another cave (plan No. 2) contains a central room, 36 feet 1 inch long, and 16 feet 5 inches wide, 6 feet

7 inches high, the main axis being oriented north 45° west. The entrance, 13 feet 2 inches wide shows neither



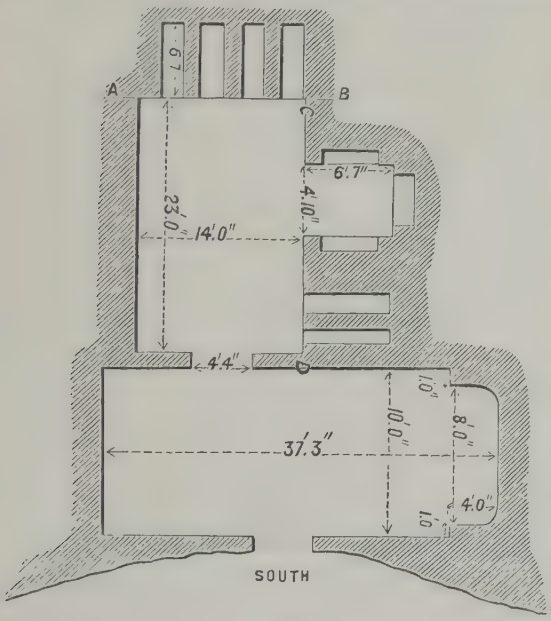
Plan of Tomb No. 2.



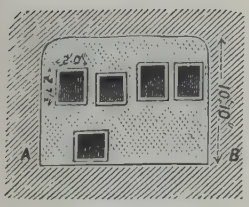
Section A, B.

stone door nor flange, a fact which would tend to prove that these entrances were shut by masonry.

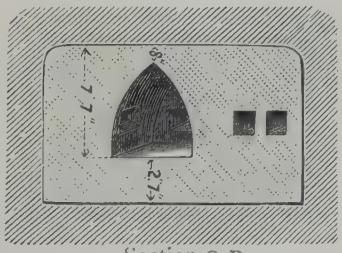
To the left, on entering, we find two large lamp stands (L L), 2 feet wide, 2 feet high, and 1 foot 7 inches deep; further on, on the same wall, is a Koka under



Plan of Tomb No. 3.



Section A B.



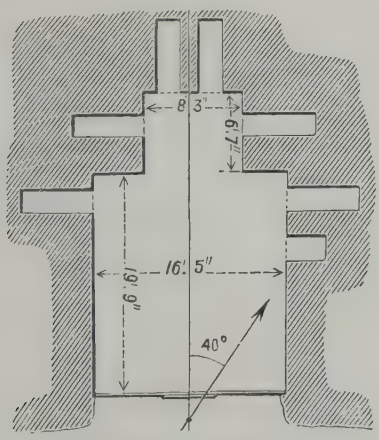
Section C, D.

an arcosolium, 6 feet 7 inches wide and 6 feet 7 inches deep, 5 feet high ; there were also two Kokim, each under its arcosolium, in the back wall facing the entrance (north). These arcosolia, are very carefully worked out of the rock ; the Kokim also were pierced with special care, they fill the entire length of the arcosolium, the width being less, forming a recess, so that a stone cover could be placed on each. The east wall contains three Kokim in a separate chamber, and a fourth Koka lies more towards the entrance. These tombs are but single storied.

A further set of tombs (Plan No. 3) contains at the southern entrance a large ante-chamber, 37 feet 3 inches long, 10 feet wide, with a Loculus under an arcosolium, 8 feet long, 4 feet wide, evidently unfinished. Passing this chamber, we enter by a doorless aperture, 4 feet 4 inches wide, into the actual sepulchre, 23 feet long, 14 feet wide, 10 feet 10 inches high, with four Kokim in the upper storey, each being 2 feet $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches high, 2 feet wide, and 6 feet 7 inches long, the outside of each being bordered by a groove $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide. The eastern wall contains a chamber 4 feet 10 inches by 6 feet 7 inches, with three Loculi under an arcosolium formed by a pointed arch. On the other side of this chamber there were two other Kokim. The western wall has no graves. A very peculiar tomb is that of Plan No. 4. There is no door, the entire south front is open to a width of

16 feet 5 inches, which is also the width of the

View from South.



Plan of Tomb No. 4.

sepulchral chamber, its length being 19 feet 9 inches.

This open entrance has sloping walls and a rounded ceiling, and is surrounded by a round cornice, about 2 inches thick, which, for the greater part, has been much damaged by the weather. Instead of any door, there is merely a step which leads from the interior to the small path which passes beside these caves.

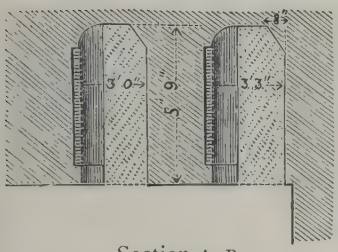
In the wall facing the entrance, we found a chamber 6 feet 7 inches by 8 feet 3 inches, containing to the north two Kokim, with round ceilings, and on each of the side walls one Koka of the same shape, all well and carefully worked. In the main chamber, we found to the right, one small and one ordinary Koka, and to the left also one Koka. Parts of the interior show signs of plastering.

The most carefully constructed tomb that is illustrated in Plan No. 5. The entrance to this cave is much broken and defaced. It leads into a chamber measuring 9 feet 10 inches by 8 feet 4 inches.

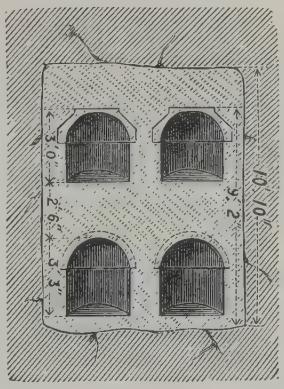
In the wall opposite, are two storeys of Koka, each storey containing two well-worked tombs.

The two upper Kokim are each 2 feet 6 inches wide, and 3 feet high, and 5 feet 9 inches long, with a small niche at the end, where the rock slopes up, in order to permit the head of the dead body being laid here, as on a cushion (*see* Section A, B. and C, D.). The ceiling of each Koka is rounded at the corners and carefully smoothed. The exterior of the Koka is framed by a five-cornered border. The Kokim of the lower storey

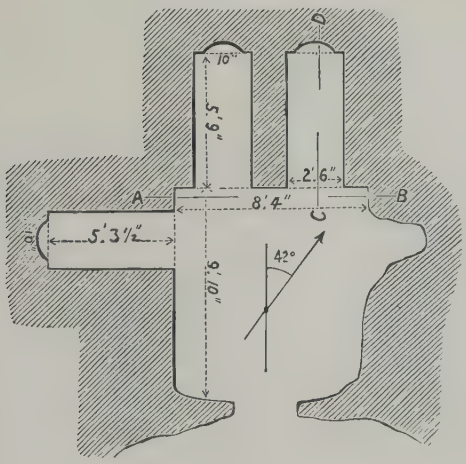
are each 3 feet 3 inches high, and each has a circular



Section A, B.



Section C, D.

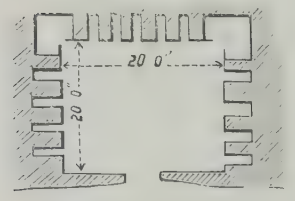


Plan of Tomb No. 5.

frame. On the wall to the left of the entrance, is a Koka of similar construction to the above, and to

the right is a sixth Koka still unfinished. The interior of this cave, which, to judge from its very careful workmanship, must have belonged to some wealthy family, is entirely plastered over and painted of a reddish colour. The ornamentation is scarcely any longer visible, but must originally have represented simple lines and cornices, the design, however, was far too much obliterated to permit of any drawing being made.

Besides the caves that are here planned, I visited another containing nine Kokim and three Loculi under arcosolia; also a two-storeyed cave measuring 37 by 30 feet, containing both sorts of graves, but this last was in a very defective state. Another cave 20 by 20 feet, contained nine Kokim in the upper storey, and thirteen Kokim in the lower, with two larger chambers opening from the corners (*see* plan No. 6.)



Plan of Tomb No. 6.

The remainder of the caves in the neighbourhood of Tell Âbil are of similar construction and plan to those already described. They are very numerous, but the soft cretaceous rock in which they are tunnelled, has in many places fallen in.

The above account is all I am able to give as the result of my short stay of two days at the site of

Âbil. I may now add a few words as to the history of this site, which is supposed to be the Abila of the Decapolis.

Josephus, (Antiq. XII., 3) gives us very little information about Abila ; he states that when Antiochus had conquered Scopas, a general commanding the armies of the son of Ptolemy Philopator, who had subdued the Jews 'in the high regions,' he (Antiochus) conquered Batanæa, Samaria, Abila, and Gadara.

According to Ritter, (Erdkunde, XVB., p. 1,060) St. Jerome names an "Abela, vini fertilis, in duodecimo a Gadaris milliario contra orientalem plagam." This is the same city which often was named together with Gadara or Capitolias, and its bishop subscribed his signature at the Council of Jerusalem in conjunction with the Bishops of the neighbouring cities of Hippos and Amathus. Further, Abila was a city situated in Northern Peraea. According to Burckhardt's 'Travels in Palestine' (Vol. 1, p. 537, Note to p. 425), Eusebius also calls the city Ἀβελ (Abel) and places it 12 miles east of Gadara. According to the same authority, Reland has read on a palmyranean inscription Αβιλη της Δεκαπολεος (the Abila of the Decapolis).

Wetzstein ('Hauran und die Trachonen' p. 101) identifies Âbil, above described with the Abel-beth-maachah mentioned in the Bible (2 Kings, XV. 29), where Tiglath-pileser, King of Assyria, met with

resistance when he conquered Peraea(*) ; he places the present Âbil on the southern borders of the Yarmûk. Dr. Wetzstein further states that the southern bank of the Yarmûk near Abîl, had served as a bulwark to the Moslems in 635 A.D. when they were expecting the attack of the Greek army, and that even in 1859 this locality had again protected the Bedawîn tribe of the Ruwala, for the advancing enemy had not dared to attack them there.

In modern days, Seetzen, as above mentioned, is the only traveller who has ever visited the place, and of it he gives an account on p. 371 of Vol. I. of his 'Travels in Syria, Palestine, &c.' He reached Abîl with great difficulty from Beit Râs, and mentions the heaps of ruins, the columns and capitals (which he describes as mostly of the Ionic order), the foundation walls, caves, vaults, and parts of the city wall, with the two bridges. He is of opinion that a temple stood on Tell Umm el 'Amad. In his days (February 1806) as at the present, no human being lived in the place.

* [Abel - beth - Maachah, or Abel Maim, is generally identified with the present village of Abîl el Kamh, a few miles west of Baniâs. Abila of the Decapolis is probably the place mentioned by the geographer Yâkût, in 1225, under the name of Abîl az Zait. "Geographical Dictionary, I. 56."—EDITOR.]

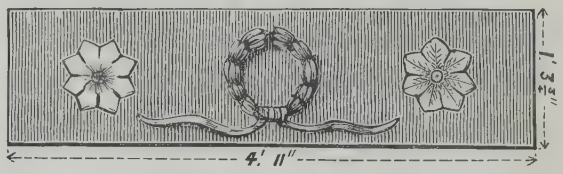
That the present Tell Âbil is to be identified with the ancient Abîla of the Decapolis, can hardly be questioned. The site of the latter is always mentioned as being near Gadara (for which we adopt Umm Keis), being at a distance of twelve Roman miles from it. Comparing this with my maps and triangulations of Northern 'Ajlûn, I find the distance, as the crow flies, from Umm Keis to Tell Âbil to be $11\frac{1}{4}$ English miles, which, taking the old Roman mile at $1472\frac{1}{2}$ metres, brings it up to exactly $12\frac{3}{4}$ Roman miles. From Âbil to Beit Râs, I found to be $6\frac{1}{4}$ English miles = 6·8 Roman miles, and from Beit Râs to Umm Keis $11\frac{1}{8}$ English miles = 12 Roman miles. The distance between Capitolias and Gadara is, according to the Peutinger Tables, 16 Roman miles, which is 4 miles too much, if Beit Râs is to be identified with Capitolias; but it must be remembered that the distances here given, are in the straight line, which a road never follows, and therefore by road these distances must always be counted as longer. With, therefore, the correspondence in the distances, and the name (Âbil = Abila), further, the considerable ruins in proof of the existence of a large city, containing Christian churches, going to prove that it very probably was the seat of a Bishop,—I do not hesitate to identify the present site with Abila of the Decapolis.

From this place, I visited on several occasions, the village of Harta, which lies about half an hour's ride

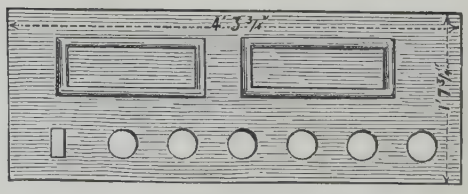
from Tell Âbil. The huts, to the number of 40, are of stone, and much better built than those at Amrâwah. The Sheikh's dwelling and Menzûl are large, well built, and clean, and the inhabitants of Harta are hospitable and friendly.

The soil of the place is poor, but groves of olive trees afford a good income to the population. The village is built close to the Wâdy Harta and has a fine out-look down into Wâdy and beyond the Yarmuk over Southern Jaulân.

Of antiquities, I only found a few caves and a Basalt-gate and lintel, built at the entrance gate of



Ornamental Lintel at Harta.



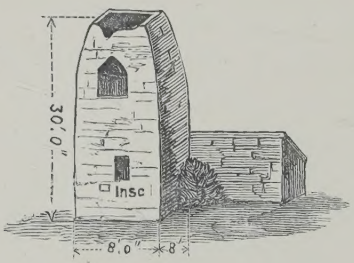
Ornamental lintel at Harta.

the Sheikh's yard, which, I suppose, was brought from one of the neighbouring caves.

From Harta, I travelled towards Wâdy Hebrâs, and passed on the road, half a mile south of Harta, a small ruin called Khirbet Treitâb خربة تريطاب. It consists of nothing but a large heap of scattered ruins. On the slopes beyond, I noticed caves, which on this occasion I could not explore. From here we rode down into the Wâdy and reached the village of Hebrâs حبراس after another half mile of road. Hebrâs has a fine spring, with a plentiful water supply, built up with ancient masonry; other wells of considerable depth, are found along the Wâdy bank, which is dry in summer. Hebrâs consists of two quarters, one, the original village, is built half way up the slope, and contains about twenty miserable huts, the new quarter lies nearer to the well and Wâdy, and consists of ten huts and some caves, plentifully populated by insects. The population of Hebrâs is for the greater part Harratîn or ploughers, *i.e.*, fellahîn, who cultivate the soil for the rich proprietors, either for daily pay, or for a small share of the crops. This class of fellahîn is considered the poorest, and they occupy a very low grade of civilisation.

At the time (1812) when Burckhardt (Travels in Palestine, Vol. I., p. 425) visited the place, he speaks of Hebrâs as the most prominent village of the district of El Kefarât, and says it was inhabited by a number of Greek Christians. Between the two quarters of the village, and on the road to Samar,

there stands the Mêdanet Hebrâs,* one of those peculiar towers, we so often met with in Haurân. The tower rises to the height of 30 feet, and is 8 feet square. At its south-western end was a Jamaah, and ruins of the mosque were still visible. The upper part is fallen in, but on its northern front I found a weather-beaten Arabic inscription, which, as much as I could make out, refers to the date of the building in the year of the Hejira.



Mêdanet Hebrâs.

From Hebrâs, we followed the road leading from Samar for nearly a mile, up the slope and across the plateau, then turning to the left rode down to the Wâdy 'Ain et Turâb, leaving Khirbet ed Deivi to the right—a small ruin, with scattered building stones. After a mile or more of riding, we arrived at the junction of the water-course coming down from the spring of 'Ain et Turâb. Above this junction there is another small ruin on a circular mound, the name of which, none of the passing fellahîn could tell me; it is named 'Al Khirbet,' (the Ruin), they unanimously stated. The road next winds round the slope and

* Mêdanet, or Minaret.

crosses the little brook, which, being a perennial stream, keeps the Wâdy of a beautiful green, and enables this valley to be cultivated. We next climbed up the opposite slope, and after a third mile's ride arrived at the fertile plateau from which point we could see Ibdar before us, and Samar beyond the Wâdy at our backs; a mile more, the fourth from Hebrâs, and we arrived at the Rujm el Menâra, described in my report on northern 'Ajlûn. A ride of three hours along the well-wooded watershed of the Yarmûk and the Wâd el 'Arab, following down the ancient aqueduct coming from Haurân, we finally reached Umm Keis, where we passed a most uncomfortable night in a sort of cavern, surrounded by snoring fellahin and coughing goats, and next morning early, proceeding to the hot springs of El Hammi, took a warm bath, and arrived before noon once again at Tiberias.

THE END.

HARRISON AND SONS, PRINTERS IN ORDINARY TO HER MAJESTY, ST. MARTIN'S LANE.